

# HEALTH

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## Perimenopause

Perimenopause marks the interval in which your body begins its transition into menopause. Perimenopause encompasses the years leading up to menopause anywhere from two to eight years plus the first year after your final period. It's a natural part of aging that signals the ending of your reproductive years.

The levels of your reproductive hormones estrogen and progesterone rise and fall unevenly during perimenopause. Your menstrual cycles may lengthen or shorten, and you begin having menstrual cycles in which you don't ovulate. It's only during cycles when you do ovulate that you can become pregnant.

When perimenopause starts and how long it lasts varies. You'll probably notice signs of impending menopause, such as menstrual irregularities, sometime in your 40s. But some women notice changes as early as their mid-30s.

Making healthy lifestyle choices may help ease some of the symptoms of perimenopause as well as promote good health as you age. These choices include:

- **Good nutrition.** Because your risk of osteoporosis and heart disease increases at this time, a healthy diet is more important than ever. Adopt a low-fat, high-fiber diet that's rich in fruits, vegetables and whole grains. Add calcium-rich foods or take a calcium supplement. Avoid alcohol and caffeine, which can trigger hot flashes.
- **Regular exercise.** Regular physical activity helps prevent weight gain, improves your sleep, strengthens your bones and elevates your mood. Try to exercise for 30 minutes or more on most days of the week.
- **Stress reduction.** Practiced regularly, stress reduction techniques, such as meditation or yoga, can promote relaxation and good health throughout your lifetime, but may be particularly helpful during the menopausal transition.

